

Pan Gu: The Chinese Origin Story

By Cynthia Stokes Brown, Big History Project on 06.13.16

Word Count **270**

Level **MAX**

A portrait of Pan Gu from Sancai Tuhui, an encyclopedia finished in 1607, featuring illustrations of subjects in the three worlds of heaven, Earth, and humanity. Wang Qi (1529-1612). Copy of Sancai Tuhui from the Asian Library, University of British Columbia.

*This origin story comes from Chinese culture. It was first written down about 1,760 **years** ago, roughly 220–265 CE, yet it must have been told orally long before that.*

In the beginning was a huge egg containing chaos, a mixture of yin and yang - female-male, aggressive-passive, cold-hot, dark-light, and wet-dry. Within this yin and yang was Pan Gu, who broke forth from the egg as the giant who separated chaos into the many opposites, including Earth and sky.

Pan Gu stood in the middle, his head touching the sky, his feet planted on Earth.

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The heavens and the Earth began to grow at a rate of 10 feet a day, and Pan Gu grew along with them. After another 18,000 years the sky was higher and Earth was thicker. Pan Gu stood between them like a pillar 30,000 miles in height, so they would never again join.

When Pan Gu died, his skull became the top of the sky, his breath became the wind and clouds, his voice the rolling thunder. One eye became the Sun and the other the Moon. His body and limbs turned into five big mountains, and his blood formed the roaring water. His veins became roads and his muscles turned to fertile land. The innumerable stars in the sky came from his hair and beard, and flowers and trees from his skin. His marrow turned to jade and pearls. His sweat flowed like the good rain and the sweet dew that nurtures all things on Earth. Some people say that the fleas and the lice on his body became the ancestors of humanity.

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